

An Exploratory Study of the Standards Movement and ELLs  
Teacher Agency and Autonomy in the Age of Accountability

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### Abstract

This study aims to better understand the effects of the standards movement both on ELLs as well as the people who work closely with them on a daily basis, namely regular classroom and ESL teachers. More specifically, it aims to understand the ways that the standards movement limits teacher agency and autonomy in the age of accountability. In order to do this, the study utilized qualitative interviews that the researcher transcribed, coded for themes, and organized into a data set in order to compare findings across interviews. In this way, the researcher was able to both understand commonalities across the data, as well as highlight the differences between participants' experiences working with ELLs under the standards movement—differences related to the schools where they taught, the socioeconomic status of their students and the resources available to them, the amount of testing their schools utilized, and/or their students' individual language levels and abilities. Recommendations for future policy regarding the standards movement and working better with ELLs that emerged from the interviews include: better support systems for ELLs who are new to the U.S. such as newcomer programs, more collaboration between ESL teachers and mainstream classroom teachers, additional help from para-educators in both the ESL classrooms as well as regular classrooms, and better records of ELLs' progress on standardized tests through year-by-year tracking. This study points to the need for continued empirical studies on the complex relationship between the standards, accountability, ELLs, and their educators in order to develop better practices for working with this population of learners and meet their needs so that they are truly "college and career ready" once they leave the American K-12 system.

## Chapter I

### Introduction

An underserved student is defined as anyone who is conventionally excluded from fully participating in society and its institutions (Paolini, 2015). Based on this definition, English Language Learners (henceforth, ELLs), are an underserved population within the American education system. ELLs are traditionally isolated from the rest of their schools both academically and physically; ESL teachers' rooms are often located far away from the center of the school or sometimes even in a separate annex (Clemente & Collison, 2000, p. 341). ELLs' high school graduation rates also look fairly bleak compared with their native English-speaking peers. While graduation rates have risen in recent years for certain previously marginalized groups of students (African American and Hispanic students, for example) that rate has decreased for ELLs ("English Language Learners," para. 2). A study by the U.S Department of Education found that while graduation rates were at an overall high of 75 percent in the 2010-2011 school year, that rate was 60 percent or lower for students with limited English language proficiency (para. 3). In the same year Arizona had only 25 percent of its ELLs graduate and in Nevada only 29 percent of ELLs graduated (Scott, 2012, para. 2). In California, where 1.5 million students reside—the highest number of ELLs in the country — 600,000 ELL students do not graduate each year, which translates to 17 percent of ELLs overall ("English Language Learners," 2013, para. 1-5).

In addition to having a lower graduation rate than their native English speaking peers as well as a higher dropout rate than them (25 and 15 percent, respectively), the achievement gap worsens for ELLs who are not reclassified as being fluent in English until later in their education. Students who are reclassified in elementary school have dropout

rates of 15 percent; ELLs reclassified in fifth grade or before have dropout rates of 22 percent, and ELLs reclassified in high school have dropout rates of about 33 percent (Levin, 2014). This finding ties in to tracking—high performing students are placed into classes that focus on higher order and critical thinking skills while students in remedial classes fall further behind their peers (Callahan, 2005, p. 307). Put in other words, the sooner ELLs are “passed through” the system and are reclassified as fluent English speakers, the better off they will be in the future and the more likely they will be to receive a complete education equal to that of their more privileged peers. Because the current education system ties school funding to the number of ELLs present in schools, however, there is little incentive to push ELLs out of language programs earlier rather than later (Levin, 2014).

This study, seeks to contribute to efforts that identify problem areas related to the standards and ELLs, specifically the lack of preparation of ELLs for assessment and the maintenance of unreasonable expectations for them in the classroom with too little scaffolding. In addition, I hope to facilitate the contribution of teachers who have worked directly with this population and can provide insight into what they see as currently conducive to learning for ELLs, and what is hindering their progress. Research that looks at the experiences of ELLs and their teachers provides invaluable input to further understand the effects of the standards on these populations and the implications of these effects for the current educational system in the United States. The ELL population is growing every year and is projected to comprise a quarter of all students in 2025 (Young, 2008), thus it is essential for more research to look at the effects of standardizing education on ELLs and their teachers.

The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' perceptions of the standards and their effects on their agency and autonomy in their work, as well as the success of their students. In order to do this, I conducted qualitative interviews with educators. Through these interviews I sought to gain a broader perspective of the intersections between ELLs' and their teachers' experiences in United States' schools—both in ELLs' interactions with regular classroom teachers as well as ESL specialists. My primary goal was to get a sense of which aspects of the standards seem to work for ELLs and their teachers, and which aspects are problematic for these populations.

This thesis contributes insight into teachers' experiences of the standards and their perceptions of how the standards affect their students. This research and other research like it is essential in order to “take the pulse” of education for certain groups of learners and teachers, gauge its efficacy for those populations, and bring to light any areas that need improvement in order to best serve the needs of both students and educators.

*Research Questions (henceforth, RQ)*

- 1) How has the implementation of the standards affected students' level of engagement, as witnessed by the teachers who work directly with them?
- 2) How has the implementation of the standards affected teachers' levels of agency and autonomy in the classroom?
- 3) Do teachers feel supported by their administration? If so, how? If not, in what ways?
- 4) Supporting ELLs:
  - a. What do teachers see as the biggest roadblock for supporting ELLs in education?

- b. What suggestions do teachers have to better support ELLs in education?

### *Definitions of Terms*

These terms and their corresponding definitions will be used throughout the study:

English Language Learner (ELL)— a learner who speaks English as anything other than his/her first language.

Long Term English Learner (LTEL)— a learner who has been enrolled in American schools for more than six years and still has not been reclassified as fluent.

Teacher agency—the personal capacity to act, typically in response to stimuli within the pedagogical environment (adapted from Priestly et al., 2012).

Teacher autonomy— teachers' abilities to direct their classrooms (Little, 1995) and possess freedom to make choices about their teaching (adapted from Aoki, 2000)

High-stakes test— any test that is used to make critical decisions regarding students, educators, schools, or districts typically for the purposes of accountability to decide whether to award or punish students and teachers based on their performance.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

#### *Basis for Study and Background*

By the year 2025, English Language Learners (ELLs) are estimated to comprise one in four students in the U.S. (Young, 2008). In the 2003-2004 school year there were about



4,999,481 ELLs enrolled in public schools nationwide while only 2.5 percent of teachers possessed a degree in either bilingual or ESL education (“National Education Association,” 2005). Of those who are endorsed to teach ELLs, elementary bilingual/ESL teachers are least likely to be fully certified, followed by secondary teachers (40 and 35 percent, respectively). About 15 percent of ELLs receive no additional support from the schools they attend and those who are enrolled in a program designed to provide them supplementary support (only 33 percent of students) meet for less than ten hours a week (Hopstock and Stephenson, 2003; “National Education Association,” 2005). As a result of their minimal support in schools, ELLs’ dropout rates are four times those of their native English-speaking peers (McKeon, 2005).

English Language Learners (ELLs) are among those most disadvantaged by the changes born of the standards movement. ELLs’ scores on standardized tests are often 20-30 percentage points lower than their native English-speaking peers’ and in 2007 nearly 70% of ELLs scored below basic on the reading tests for the National Assessment for Educational Progress (August, 2010). In 2014, the graduation rate for ELLs in New York public schools was 31% as opposed to the state’s average of 75%, and while 37.2 percent of high school graduates in New York ranked “college ready,” only 5.9 percent of ELLs did (Ramirez, 2015). Since educational institutions are one of the primary means through which power is either maintained or contested, it is essential to look at how the standards movement has served to preserve power in the hands of a few, while denying its access to many.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) claim to prepare K-12 students to be “college and career ready” once they leave the secondary education system (CCSS, 2015). On the

“Myths” versus “Facts” page of the website, Common Core addresses the questions people have raised about the standards regarding their relative emphasis on fiction/literature, English teachers’ roles in teaching social studies and science, and the notion that the standards are skill-based and don’t include enough content (CCSS, 2015). Nowhere on this list is there any mention of ELLs and the manifold issues that come from expecting them to meet the requirements of these standards for which they are underprepared and underserved in schools. Social movements determine what knowledge counts as legitimate and whose needs are accounted for. As Apple (2002) argued, there is an “increasingly strong relationship between regimes of accountability and testing and the curriculum that is planned and enacted” (p. 25). This dogmatic relationship has served to widen the gap between those who are served by public education, and those who are not. Because individuals’ answers to the question “What knowledge is of most worth?” are inevitably different, it is essential to look at whose needs are being met by CCSS, and whose are not.

Previous studies have focused on the negative effects of standards on teacher agency, autonomy, professional identity, and accountability, as well as the motivational effects on low-achieving students (Darling-Hammond, 2004; McNeil, 2000; Booher-Jennings, 2005; Bodman, Taylor, & Morris, 2012; Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005). Despite this research, few studies have looked at the standards’ effects on ELLs who are already at a disadvantaged position in mainstream education. Because teachers’ action or inaction in the classroom forms the essential link between policy and student learning, and either opens or closes the door to opportunities for certain groups of students, it is essential to look at the ways the standards have

impacted teacher agency in working with ELLs. This will help policy makers to better understand what changes can be made to improve support for this population of students. In this study, in-depth interviews with teachers will illuminate this area to potentially provide answers.

### *Historical Background of Standards Movement*

The Soviet's launch of the first artificial satellite, Sputnik, on October 4, 1957 resulted in the United States' fear that their power was being overtaken and ushered in strict accountability measures in education to regain the U.S.' ruling position. These changes radically altered the way curricula functioned. At this time, it began to be seen as something to purchase rather than spend time developing through democratic processes, and teachers' roles began to evolve from experts whose opinions mattered and were worthy in their own right to being "managers of efficient instruction of material that was handed down and quite often simply imposed" (Apple, 2002, p. 36). This "de-skilling" of teachers has only exacerbated over the years with the influx of tighter standards; teachers' power in the classroom and ability to determine the content they teach has continued to decrease. As time has gone on, teachers have increasingly been seen as deliverers of knowledge rather than critically thinking, autonomous individuals capable of inspiring something in their students that standardized curricula cannot. With these changes, teachers' expertise has been largely devalued in favor of regimes of accountability.

Educational experts have long voiced concerns over the shifts that have come with the standards movement as curricula have moved towards efficiency and outcomes-based education over measuring student growth (Dewey, 1938; Callahan 1962; Gardner, 1983; "A Nation at Risk" 1984; Ellwein, Glass, & Smith, 1988; Eisner, 2002). The debate connects to

the “historical roots of the field” (Apple, 2002, p. 40). While some conservatives have argued that the standards have ushered in a new form of progressive education in line with Dewey and the progressives (Hirsch, 1996; Ravitch, 2005), others have maintained that outcomes-based education focused on prescribed content reflects a traditional mentality (Apple, 2002, p. 36). This debate over standards has not only concerned the “what” of curriculum, but also the “how” since how one teaches is intimately connected to how one views the world (p. 38). An ideology of education that claims students should memorize facts and regurgitate them reflects one kind of mentality, while an ideology that sees learning as being emergent from students’ interactions with problems reflects a very different one. For this reason, the argument over what and how to teach represents larger ideological schisms that make it difficult for those whose standpoints differ to see eye-to-eye.

With these growing divisions in education has come a movement of homeschooling that cuts across race, class, religious, and social status backgrounds (Apple, 2002). This is due to a growing belief that:

Standardized education offered by mainstream schooling interferes with [...] children’s potential. There is a serious danger when the state intrudes into the life of the family, [when] experts and bureaucracies are apt to impose their beliefs and are unable to meet the needs of families and children (p. 39, see also Stevens, 2001, pp. 4-7).

Thus, the failure of the standards is not only relevant to specific groups of students who are marginalized under the “Common Core,” but applies to everyone. When greater numbers of

parents look to alternative means to educate their children, something is evidently not working in the public education system and needs to be addressed.

Standards that are imposed from a hierarchical system have no way of understanding the local and specific contexts of classrooms for which they prescribe what they deem to be the “core” of educational knowledge. Coherence in curriculum cannot be imposed from a top down structure that claims to know what is best for all, but rather needs to be developed over time from the bottom up. Apple (2002) put it succinctly, “What counts as core knowledge [within the Standards movement] has all too often been someone’s core, not everyone’s core” (p. 35). Under the standards, the gap between the haves and the have-nots has exacerbated, with individual students from marginalized groups getting help along the way while the majority of those groups are left even further behind (McNeil, 2005). General aptitude and knowledge has been sacrificed for students’ demonstration of proficiency on very specific subject matter as evidenced through their test scores. Because of this, there has been a decline in all students’ knowledge and range of competencies (McNeil, 2005).

In addition to limiting students’ abilities to gain the knowledge they need to be successful once they enter the real world, the standards limit teachers’ agency and professional identity as well (Bodman, Taylor, & Morris, p. 15). This “depowering” and “deskilling” of teachers has come with the influx of “ready made” materials that only require teachers to spoon feed knowledge to students rather than engage with them in a meaningful way. Apple (2002) posited the idea that the “quality of curricula and teaching is to be evaluated only on (often artificially manufactured) improvements in students’ scores on tests is less than satisfactory and shows a profound misunderstanding of the complexity

of the teaching act” (p. 29). When teachers are reduced to being deliverers of knowledge, their entire profession is dismissed and their vocation is reduced to being a “passive technician” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) thereby limiting classroom potential. Because students take as many as 20 standardized tests throughout the year (Lazarin, 2015, p. 3), teachers are severely limited in terms of how much time they can spend on anything outside of what the standards’ dictate. Valenzuela (2005) explained, this “attach[es] high-stakes consequences to schools and districts and thereby encourag[es] a reductive, test-driven curriculum (p. 2).

Administrative observations are another imposition of standardized education that limit teacher agency in the classroom since they account for as much as 60 percent of teachers’ evaluation (Lazarin, 2015). This “hostile view of teacher accountability” (Apple, 2002, p. 33) weakens the trust between teachers and their overseers since it indicates that teachers’ are not to be trusted with the task of educating students, establishing them instead as puppets to be controlled and manipulated by their superiors. According to O’Hear (1994), this move towards increased surveillance is “part of a wider thrust of policy to take away professional control of public services and establish so-called consumer control through a market structure” (pp. 65-66 as cited in Apple, 2002, p. 33). This reclamation of control from teachers serves both the conservative ideology of a return to the “good old days” of discipline and prescribed content as well as the middle class desire to be in control over children’s education. The ability of the standards to appeal to two very ideologically different camps of people makes it even more difficult to restructure.

While this desire for greater accountability and control over students’ education is appealing to many, it has been found to be largely a chimera or a “symbolic

accomplishment” that obscures the issues and makes them more difficult to see clearly (Placier, Walker, & Foster, 2002, p. 282). In order to comply with regulations, schools have resorted to manipulation in order to ensure their maintenance of accreditation (Ellwein, Glass, & Smith, 1988; McPartland & Schneider, 1996). In order to raise the scores of African Americans and Latino students in Texas, for example, teachers gave them hour after hour and day after day of drills so that they would show improved test scores. Because of this rigorous, repetitive, and isolated instruction, however, these students missed out on learning the same subject matter as their peers, thus widening the gap between minority students and white, middle class students (Apple, 2002, p. 31, see also McNeil, 2005, p. 92).

Schools can also opt out of testing ELLs and other underserved students who they deem as being unprepared for the tests and thus would potentially reflect badly on schools’ preparation of them (McPartland & Schneider, 1996). In Texas, schools have found ways to exclude thousands of students from having to take the tests (Apple, 2002, p. 30), see also McNeil, 2005). Another way schools manipulate the standards to their benefit is to declare chronic absentees as dropouts, which causes attendance rates to appear higher and improves the overall average of test scores (Ellwein, Glass, & Smith, 1988; McPartland & Schneider, 1996). Additionally, according to Apple (2002), if schools continue to fail after many years “money can be spent on (state approved) private tutoring and supplemental services that can include religious and for-profit institutions and the running of the school can be turned over to a private, for-profit company (p. 29, see also Jennings, 2003). This is problematic in many ways, but especially in light of a democratic, “standard” curriculum, the notion that schools are becoming privatized and are upholding the interests of individual actors is troublesome. These measures offer opportunities for advancement to

certain students, while denying access to those same opportunities to others. Clearly, “one size fits all” is a misnomer.

### *Teacher Agency*

Teachers’ senses of both individual agency as well as collective agency are critical to their personal and professional development (Flessner et al., 2012, p. 2). Teacher agency is also a means to the creation of a fair society (p. 2) since what happens in the classroom mirrors in small and large ways what happens in the real world. Flessner’s et al. (2012) definition of agency is that the “individual believes his/her voice in this world matters, that collaborating with others increases his/her awareness of multiple perspectives and that the external influences of our society can support or hinder one’s moral purpose” (p. 2). In this way, agency serves as the connection between oneself and others and “casts voice as the connection between reflection and action” (Richert, 1992, p. 197). In order for inequalities outside of the classroom to be ameliorated, it is imperative that they be addressed in the classroom first. Teachers’ sense of agency in the classroom is the first step towards their being able to help students with agency as well.

Governmental policies of accountability ignore local classroom contexts and pit teachers against one another in competition, rejecting the critical nature of agency in the creation of a just classroom environment. A fear of potentially falling short on standardized test scores causes teachers to “teach to the test,” narrowing their focus to the specific content covered therein as opposed to focusing on student learning and growth (Patrizio, 2012, p. 111). Outcomes-based education which reifies efficiency also limits teachers’ abilities to critically reflect on their practice, utilize culturally relevant pedagogy, and re-teach material when necessary (p. 111). This process has the effect of limiting what they



are capable of in their classrooms and how much of a difference teachers can actually make in students' lives. For ELLs, who often come from more marginalized backgrounds, receiving individual attention from their teachers can mean the difference between having a successful career and life and being continually pushed into the background by society, perpetuating cycles of inequality and injustice.

Teachers act as agents of change as well as agents of socialization (Campbell, 2012). As such, their roles are to help students integrate into society, but also to intervene if and when society limits the opportunities available to certain students. Teachers can provide a bridge to students who need extra help to be successful, giving them additional attention, instruction, and practice in order for them to learn material that might come easier to students with greater numbers of available resources. In this way, teachers' abilities to possess the agency and discretion to give extra help to students when they need it and not be tied down by administrative procedures forms a critical link to the creation of a just world, where opportunity is truly available to all.

The idea that teachers are responsible for acting both as agents of change as well as agents of socialization creates friction for teachers regarding where their efforts should lie. Gitlin and Margonis (1995) looked at the ways teacher agency limits successful reform since it is a "free agent" incapable of being controlled. In this way, one could argue that policies which try to limit teachers' agency are doomed to failure since it is impossible to account for every aspect of teachers' instruction and overarching policies' intentions will always be manipulated as they move down the food chain before ending up in teachers' hands.

*Accountability and Principals' Evolving Roles*

Under NCLB and Common Core and with the influx of an era of accountability, principals' roles have changed from being those of building managers to being instructional exemplars (Scanlan, 2012, p. 24). With this change has come more responsibility for principals to model how they want their teachers to act. According to Clark et al. (2009), looking at the quality of the principal can predict the quality of education being delivered. For populations of marginalized students who come from varying race, class, and linguistic backgrounds, having a principal who promotes equality and social justice can make a huge difference in their lives. If the principal views these students' cultural and historical backgrounds as assets rather than hindrances, they are more included in the curriculum and their knowledge is seen as useful. Principals do not need to initially be equipped with this knowledge either; it can be taught through both practice and professional development (Scanlan, 2012).

In order to be coherent, school reform efforts must be structured around a shared idea of student success that recognizes students' cultural backgrounds and histories. A study found that among 247 high schools, the strongest predictor of who would drop out was "the degree to which students felt the teachers were good teachers who respected them as well as taught them well" (Housman and Martinez, 2002, p. 8). When students feel respected, cared for, and listened to, there is more of an incentive for them to try hard and care about how well they do in school. Inversely, when this is absent or when students do not feel supported by their teachers or administrators, they are more likely to have negative feelings about their school experience, put forth less effort, and are more likely to drop out as a result.

School administrators can provide opportunities and devote time to professional development for teachers to help them better work with marginalized groups of students. For example, one aspect of training could focus on helping teachers learn to distinguish between cognitive and literacy impairments so that fewer ELLs are tracked into special education programs due to schools' inability to distinguish between these two issues. According to Housman and Martinez (2002), in order for these changes to occur, "the academic leadership must hold all faculty—not only those who specialize in bilingual or multilingual education—responsible for their part in preparing teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms (p. 9). Principals have a unique role in this pursuit due to their standing as figureheads for the school, so their focus and actions have a direct impact on the quality of education for all students.

Tracking school data is another way of keeping schools accountable to serving all students equally since it has the ability to reveal where the gaps are and can lead to schools' improvements in those areas. For example, data can look at the retention/dropout rates of schools, the performance of different grade levels, and various students' access to gifted programs (Housman and Martinez, 2002) and make changes accordingly. While this data can come in the form of a policy at the federal, state, or local level, it can also come simply from schools' commitments to tracking these changes on a yearly basis and developing programs in line with what the data reveals. For example, if data shows that certain students are uniformly being tracked into special education programs despite the fact that their challenge lies in literacy rather than cognitive development, further training of teachers can be put in place to provide them the skill sets they need to be able to distinguish between these two issues, and programs can be developed to provide extra

literacy help for students who need additional scaffolding in this area. This will allow these students to receive the support and background knowledge they need rather than misdiagnosing them and treating them discordantly.

Other means of holding schools accountable to better working with ELLs include measures that are student-centered and seek to integrate students' backgrounds and linguistic cultures more in their education, seeing them as resources rather than deficits. "Vertical teaming" posits that ESL teachers be present at various departmental meetings with "mainstream" teachers to enrich the conversation and develop a shared knowledge base amongst teachers regarding best practices to work with this population of students. In addition, having ESL teachers in each mainstream classroom can help ELLs to continue learning the same content as non-English learners but do so in way that is appropriate to their level of language ability. Housman and Martinez (2002) provided an example of a school in which the majority of the students were Native American ELLs, so an administrative requirement mandated that within seven years of working at the school teachers had to be bilingual in one of the primary languages of the students (p. 10). If more teachers are held accountable to speaking their students' native languages there will be fewer issues related to a lack of content understanding and greater "buy in" from students who will see their teachers putting forth effort and will be more inclined to do the same.

Reaching out to parents has been proposed as another measure of actively engaging students' personal backgrounds and making their education more relevant and meaningful. If parents don't speak English there needs to be a greater number of teachers who know their students' native languages and can communicate with them. If the parents don't know how to read, administrators can call them or visit their homes. Discussion groups between

parents and teachers can help to bridge this gap, as well as offering adult education classes to parents after school hours. It is imperative to begin moving away from the idea of “English-only” classrooms to make communicating with one another more of a truly collaborative effort. Policies and practices that begin from a social justice point of view can act as a bridge between the world of education and students’ personal histories to create a more hospitable environment for students and offer more equitable education.

### *English Language Learners*

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), from 2011 to 2012, ELL students “made up an average of 14.2 percent of total public school enrollment, ranging from 10.9 percent in small cities to 16.7 percent in large cities. In suburban areas, ELLs constituted an average of 9 percent of public school enrollment, ranging from 6.4 percent in midsize suburban areas to 9.4 percent in large suburban areas” (“NCES,” n.d., para. 4). While there are ELLs throughout the United States, 61 percent of them are concentrated in California, Arizona, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois; California alone educates a third of those learners or 1.6 million students (Payan & Nettles, n.d.). In addition to the heavy concentration of ELLs in these six states, other states have seen a 300 percent or higher growth of ELLs in the ten-year period from 1995-2005. Despite the fact that ELLs represent a significant population in U.S. schools and their numbers are growing, they continue to be underserved and schools continue to be understaffed for being able to deal with them effectively.

According to a roundtable report by the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, there are four states with requirements of specific coursework related to working with ELLs for all teachers, 17 states whose teacher certification standards include references to the needs of working with this population of students, seven states that use standards published by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) which includes reference to the needs of these students, and eight states whose standards reference “language” as an example of diversity. Fifteen states have no requirements that teachers receive special expertise or training to work with ELLs (“Educating English Language Learners” n.d.). The U.S. Department of Education reported that in the 2011-2012 school year, ELLs made up 14 percent of students who were enrolled and 18 percent of those held back in grades K-6 (“Retention and Suspension”, 2015). In a similar vein, a “Fast Facts” spreadsheet by the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) showed that in 2010, 40 California school districts reported that 59 percent of ELLs in high school were LTELs or “long-term English learners” and 50 percent of kindergarteners may become LTELs (“Profiles of English Learners”). In other words, over half of students in public secondary schools do not receive the same education as non-English learners, and half of those who come into the system as kindergarteners will meet the same fate. This has significant implications when considering a finding by Chicago Public Schools in 2009 that LTELs had “the worst performance (i.e. failed the most classes and had lower GPAs on average) of any ELL group (e.g. new ELLs, recently exited ELLs, or never ELLs) (“The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research”). As these findings indicate, it is imperative that policies and practices direct more attention

towards working with this population of students since their needs are dramatically underserved.

One way of addressing this issue has been the proposal of funneling ELLs into language-intensive groups or offering additional tutoring inside or outside of school. The problem with this proposal is that putting ELLs into groups outside of mainstream classes isolates them from their peers and denies them access to content knowledge on which they will be tested both on standardized tests as well as potentially in college (Callahan, 2005). Since it typically takes learners six years to fully learn a language (Callahan, 2005), and learning content is more important for ELLs than focusing on language proficiency alone (Apple, 2002) there must be alternative ways of incorporating ELLs into mainstream education earlier so that they are not isolated from their peers and the education they are getting.

While learning content is important for ELLs and it is essential that they be integrated into mainstream classes earlier, it is also important to acknowledge the linguistic requirements of ELLs under the standards, especially in terms of assessments. Standardized tests require that ELLs utilize multiple skills at once, which is problematic in light of the fact that learners are typically more proficient in certain skills over others (Abedi, 2004). ELLs who are asked to show their work by writing out proof to a math problem may be unable to truly showcase their knowledge if they are not good at writing, for example. In this instance, their abilities will not be accurately reflected and they will be seen as performing at a lower level than they are actually capable.

Cultural bias is another barrier that affects how well ELLs are able to showcase their knowledge on standardized tests. If an ELL has never seen multiple-choice questions on an exam, for example, and is not familiar with how to fill out the form correctly, his/her knowledge will not be accurately reflected (Glass and Sinha, 2013). If the test utilizes unfamiliar vocabulary, cultural references or colloquial expressions, students may be unable to fully understand what is being asked of them (Young, 2008). Questions that assume students will understand certain references exclude those who are not familiar with them or who don't possess the necessary background knowledge to respond appropriately.

Modification of tests can help to adapt content to ELLs' levels of knowledge. These modifications include translating tests into students' native languages, providing access to bilingual dictionaries or word lists, testing in smaller groups, extending the amount of time ELLs get to take tests, and providing additional breaks (Young, 2008, p. 4-5). Researchers have identified ways assessments can be adapted, such as using simplified language, minimizing unnecessary language or information, and including examples with contexts that are familiar to students (like a school setting) (p. 4). When implemented, these accommodations help to "level the playing field" between ELLs and non-English learners.

Individual tutoring and "dual track" classes have also been proposed as resources that can provide ELLs more support in their studies and adjustment while at the same time not taking away from their experience of mainstream education (McPartland & Schneider, 1996; Mac Iver, 1993). The program "Success For All" is an example of an agenda that offers intensive tutoring for ELLs to help them get on track with their peers (Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1993; McPartland & Schneider, 1996, p. 74). Flexible uses



of time can also help to minimize the gap between lower and higher-scoring students. These flexible uses include offering “double dose” courses in particular subjects for students who need additional help and providing bridge classes in which students are allowed to move up in grades with their peers while at the same time receiving the assistance they need to catch up academically (Mac Iver, 1993; McPartland & Schneider, 1996).

Teachers’ incorporation of culturally relevant pedagogy is a crucial way to include marginalized groups into mainstream education and make learning relevant to their lives and experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Standardized curricula are disconnected from many of the issues that affect students on a daily basis. It often does not account for issues of race, class, and social status, and does not address larger issues of the world, but sacrifices those discussions for standardized content that is often times irrelevant to students’ lived experiences. As Apple aptly articulated (2002),

If one listens carefully to the voices of our most dispossessed students about what kind of curricula and teaching they want and respond to, it is one in which both the knowledge and the teachers connect with their lives, with the kinds of cultural forms and content in which they are already immersed (p. 36)

Because students enter the classroom with varying knowledge, cultural backgrounds, family structures, and many other character traits, using information that is meaningful to them is essential to assuring their success. There are multiple ways of reading texts: accepting it, accepting parts but rejecting others, or rejecting it fully (Apple, 2002, p. 26), so in order for marginalized groups to *not* reject texts fully, efforts must be made to incorporate their knowledge and make learning relevant to them.

While incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into schools will help with the problem of dispossessed students, it is not enough to solve the manifold problems that currently exist in schools. Schools must be held accountable for the progress of *all* of their students, not just some. Curriculum tracking is one way that schools are able to push along a certain group of students, while denying those same opportunities to others who are tracked into remedial classes. This not only affects students' experiences while in school, but follows them later in life as well. Villegas (1988) addressed this problem when she said, "As long as schools perform [a] sorting function in society, it must necessarily produce winners and losers[...]. Culturally sensitive remedies to educational problems of oppressed minority students that ignore the political aspect of schooling are doomed to failure (p. 262-263). Because of this multi-faceted problem, it's essential that CCSS both incorporate more culturally relevant pedagogy into its requirements, as well as address the issue of curriculum tracking at the formal policy level if it truly seeks to prepare all students to be "college and career ready" once they graduate.

The tracking of people into "winners" and "losers" and the availability of resources to some and denial of them to others is not a new phenomenon and has been happening for centuries. Immigrants who came to the U.S. in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were limited in their ability to vote, to gain citizenship status, and to obtain job opportunities on the basis of their literacy (Jacobson, 1998). Racial classifications acted as a sorting mechanism for determining who would receive the majority of resources and opportunities, and who was denied those same supplies (Ladson-Billings, 2012, p. 116). This same sort of stratification happens in schools where certain students are pushed along and allowed to advance through the system, while underserved students are seen as deficient.

Educators and educational researchers have long touted the benefits of looking at individual student growth rather than proficiency as a means to compare students not to each other but to themselves (Dewey, 1938; Eisner, 2002; McPartland & Schneider, 1996). Individual acknowledgement of students' success has been shown to improve their performance in English and mathematics, and has increased their reported interest in a given topic (Slavin, 1980; Beady, Slavin, & Fennessey 1981; Mac Iver, 1993). Students also perform better when they are provided clear expectations of their work as well as examples of what high-, average-, and low-level work looks like, when larger tasks are broken down into smaller chunks, and when they are evaluated individually as opposed to compared to other students (McPartland & Schneider, 1996). Standardized curriculum that does not acknowledge individual student improvement but rather holds all students accountable to the same level of knowledge production ignores the fundamental differences between students and thus sacrifices the ability to reach all of them.

Making growth a more central aspect of students' evaluation has the potential to increase their motivation to work hard in school, and thus get better grades overall. Because the focus is currently the other way around—with their proficiency compared to peers mattering more than their individual growth—students who underperform may feel little motivation to try harder. A change in the focus on how students are evaluated can counterbalance this issue to make evaluations more meaningful for individual students and encourage growth for all rather than proficiency for a few.

### Chapter III

#### Conceptual Framework

Poststructuralism was used as the primary conceptual framework of this study because of the way it eschews the “public/private” and “rational/emotional” dichotomies, having the potential to be revelatory about teachers’ professional and personal identities and the ways they influence one another. Viewing teachers’ complex identities through a poststructural lens opens up spaces for critiquing the political motivation and implicit control behind the creation of the false binaries of public/private (Zembylas, 2003, p. 217). As Varghese et al. (2005) write, “in order to understand language teaching and learning, we need to understand teachers: the professional, cultural, political, and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them” (p. 22). Through looking at teachers’ identities and understanding how and through what processes they are constructed we can better understand the processes of language teaching and learning. Uncovering the ways teachers’ identities are self-constructed and/or other-imposed has the potential to reveal aspects of teacher agency and control over their classrooms and the nature of teaching in today’s climate more broadly.

Because teachers’ identities affect how they see themselves, it is essential to look at the ways teachers’ professional identities intertwine with their personal identities—how the two mutually construct one another. Just as it is a false dichotomy to expect that the rational/emotional components of oneself can be separated from one another, it is a false dichotomy to expect that teachers can keep their emotions “out” of the classroom. Teaching is a necessarily affective endeavor—to claim that teachers must stifle their emotions to act as unfeeling deliverers of knowledge neuters them of being fully self-actualized

participants in their careers and lives. When teachers express their emotions in the classroom or reveal the affective dimensions of their work, they are posited as weak or are shamed by others for this self-investment. This labeling as an outlier is oppressive and prohibits teachers from ever fully participating in their own reality for fear of judgment.

A poststructural conceptual framework views identity as something that is dynamic, continually “becoming,” and thus constantly redefined based on one’s surroundings and experiences. It is constructed through both individual self-reflection as well as social interaction, and is influenced by one’s socio-political surroundings (Foucault, 1984; Butler, 1997; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It is impossible to separate identity from the environments that shape it; in this way, studying school culture and perceiving the political nature of it is a critical component to understanding who teachers are and who they have the opportunity to become.

I undertook interviews from a poststructuralist lens to learn more about how teachers feel about their current situations teaching under the standards. As Gorsky (2008) articulated, “if we are not battling explicitly against the prevailing social order [...we are], by inaction, supporting it” (Gorski, p. 516). In line with this mode of thought, my aim is to contribute to the battle against the prevailing order of public education in the United States by giving voice to inequalities within education and identifying whose needs are met by it and who is othered, tokenized, and excluded from it. Seeking the perspectives of teachers will help to destabilize the ostensible order of education to complicate the picture and provide a more holistic understanding of what is currently occurring under the standards movement. As well, I hoped to give teachers a chance to tell their stories and make sense of their personal experiences since we learn more about ourselves and our emotions through

conversation (Zembylas, 2003, p. 231) and as Farrell (2011) says, “language teachers’ verbalizations of their experiences can provide a window onto their professional identities” (p. 56). Furthermore, how we interpret and act on our identities is a political process, one that is capable of transformation. As Nias (1996) argues, “the affect revealed in the making and telling of stories can become a productive starting point for collective action” (as cited in Zembylas, 2003, p. 231), thus narrative and having a platform to tell one’s stories is the necessary first step towards change. We are only able to exercise agency in our lives when we accept that our identities and the roles we take on are not inherently predetermined but are socially constructed and immensely political. Identity continually evolves through social discourse; in this way storytelling and narrative provide teachers with the self-reflective space to take a deeper look at their identities—both who they are and who they wish to become.

### Methodology

This study was qualitative in nature, meaning it did not produce findings that were discovered through statistical measures or quantitative procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). I chose this method because it is best able to capture participants’ experiences in an in-depth manner and provide new perspectives on long-discussed issues. Because the debate surrounding standardized instruction versus student-centered teaching has long existed, I chose to conduct a qualitative study to contribute to this ongoing conversation by taking an in-depth look at the experiences of ELLs’ teachers within education to see if this can illuminate any new facets of the debate. Strauss and Corbin (1990) maintained that qualitative methods can be used to “uncover and understand what lies behind any

phenomenon about which little is yet known” (p. 19). I hope that this study contributes to what is currently known about ELLs’ and their teachers’ experiences under the standards movement in education and provides insight into which aspects of teaching and learning within this system work for them and which do not.

I collected data through in-depth interviews with both ESL and regular classroom teachers. Teachers were located in Kansas, Missouri, Mississippi, Texas, and Oregon. Each interview lasted about an hour and was guided by open-ended questions to which participants related their personal experiences teaching ELLs and working with them in varying contexts. Interviews took place in person for those who were located in Kansas, and on FaceTime, Skype, or the phone for participants located in different states. I recorded the interviews using an iPhone, and later transcribed them for coding. Interviewees comprised K-12 teachers who have had experience teaching under the standards movement, whether that is No Child Left Behind (NCLB) or Common Core. I interviewed a total of nine participants in order to get a local, particular picture of a select group of teachers’ experiences. I utilized content analysis to analyze the data and identify recurrent themes.

### *Researcher Positionality*

Through my work as a Peace Corps volunteer English Teacher and Teacher Trainer in Cambodia and my continued interest in teaching ELLs once I returned to the U.S. in both Oregon and Kansas, I have a vested interest in this research. I embarked on this research in order to learn more about the standards—the ways they are affecting teacher/student relationships broadly, but also how they are specifically affecting the population of ELLs.

While beginning my Master's degree in Oregon, I witnessed the demands the standards place on students through tutoring an ELL who had just arrived from China and was considered a "newcomer." She spoke some English, but was shy and had a hard time coming out of her shell. She was nervous about speaking, and as a result stayed silent most of the time. While I was supposed to be tutoring her in English, I often ended up helping her with required assignments for school since she was lost on what was expected of her and wasn't getting the help she needed from her teachers. I was surprised at the difficulty level of the readings and assignments she was asked to complete—it seemed far beyond her level of knowledge that made me wonder about the kind of attention and instruction she was actually getting in school.

When I moved to Kansas to continue my degree at KU, I started tutoring and worked with a sixth grade African American student who had fallen far behind on his reading skills in the classroom. His mother expressed frustration with the school as she said he had been "on track" with everyone else in his class the previous year and then all of the sudden—due to his standardized test scores—was being placed in remedial reading where he did reading exercises on a computer with little input from the supervising teacher. In these extra classes students were seated next to one another with minimal supervision, so they would often just goof off and distract each other. I began to see a pattern among marginalized students whose needs weren't being met in the classroom—simply being shoved aside and given busy work to maintain the façade of receiving an equal education. This prompted me to do more research both on my own and in my graduate classes, and what I discovered about public education in the U.S. led me to believe this is a crucial issue in need of contributing voices. Since minority students and ELLs are traditionally



overlooked by mainstream education (Clemente and Collison, 2000) it is imperative to take a hard look at the ways educational systems deal with these students in order to clearly see what must change.

My interest and concern in the power relations inherently embedded in the K-12 educational system led me to conduct my study from a critical perspective and through a poststructuralist lens. In this way, I situated data gathered from interviews in “historical and cultural contexts [as I was implicated] in the process of collecting and analyzing data and relative to the findings” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 52). In line with poststructuralism, I analyzed my research from the point of view that there is no single “truth” for a given text or piece of information as each person who interacts with a text brings a different set of experiences and values to the interaction. Critical theory supports this idea of instability in research and thus does not seek to paint a broad picture of a phenomenon, but a local one (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Accordingly, this study seeks to give an account of the experiences of nine participants who have taught under the standards movement.

As a researcher geared towards critical theory, my primary area of interest is to examine power imbalances at play in the classroom and within the broader societal context of education. These interests inevitably shaped interview questions, my interactions with teachers, and the data I collected. Each interview and set of data collected were unique and reflected the interface between the participant and myself as well as the discussion surrounding the specific context in which they work, as well as their own personal histories, sets of experiences, and values.

Research has shown that our self-perceptions and senses of identity are constructed through interaction with others (Cooley, 1902, pp. 183-184; De Coeur, Rawes, & Warecki,

2012). Thus, I approach my research from the point of view that identity is a fundamental component of education that must be accounted for and prioritized for learning to occur.

bell hooks said,

Th[e] learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin (hooks, 1994: 13).

I believe that learning can only occur if and when both teachers and students invest in one another and build up a level of trust in and respect for each other so that they can begin to learn together. In my interviews with teachers, I sought to further understand what the effects the standards have had on this necessarily synergistic relationship between teachers and students.

## Chapter IV

### Findings

#### *Demographic Information of Participants*

During the interviews I collected demographic information about the participants, as outlined in Table 1. The teachers interviewed for this project had a mean teaching length of 11 years and a range of 2- 25 years. Eight of the respondents were female and one was male.

*Teacher Profiles*

Grace<sup>1</sup> has been teaching ESL for one year at an elementary school, and taught kindergarten for seven years before that. She has her Master's degree in TESOL, an ESL endorsement to teach K-5, and is trained in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). She teaches five grades at her school— kindergarten and grades 1, 2, 3, 4 and serves about 25 students. School wide there are about 100 ESL students. Her school is very diverse, high needs, and is both a title reading and a title math school. About a quarter of the school's entire population are ELLs. Her school's ESL system is a pull out system where she takes students out of their regular classrooms to work with them individually for about 20-25 minutes a day, four days a week. It is up to her to determine the content of the lessons.

Mandy teaches ESL at a private elementary school as well as to grades 7 and 9 at a public high school in southern Mississippi, where she has been teaching for the past year. Before that, she taught at five different schools for one year. She works with a co-teacher at the middle school and the lessons are pull out sessions where she takes students out for individual or small group work. In addition to teaching ESL, Mandy also teaches a remedial reading class. She has her endorsement to teach English and French for grades 7-12 and is not ESL-endorsed. The students she works with primarily come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, with many of the students having free or reduced lunch at the public school.

Rebecca has her Master's degree in TESOL and a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on diverse populations. She has been working in the field of TESOL in a range

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<sup>1</sup> All names of teachers are pseudonyms

of occupations for over 25 years—as a middle school teacher, a teacher of online classes at various colleges around the country, as well as having served as the state director of ESL, bilingual, migrant, and Indian education programs in Kansas. When she began work as the director of these programs, there were only 1000 students identified as ELLs in the state but due to Rebecca’s work to secure state funding that supports students who are ELL identified and teachers who are working on their endorsements, there are now over 50,000 ELLs identified in the state of Kansas. Currently, Rebecca teaches students in grades six, seven, and eight at a middle school with a co-teacher and serves about 63 students. Her school serves a variety of students from different backgrounds. Students come every other day for ESL class during their guided study period, for 42 minutes at a time in groups as big as six and as small as two. Additional time can be scheduled to meet if students need individualized instruction. Rebecca and her co-teacher determine the content of their lessons.

Amelia is Rebecca’s co-teacher. They have been working together for the past two years. Amelia worked as a librarian for seventeen years before beginning to teach ESL at the same middle school as Rebecca. She has her ESL endorsement and has taught ESL for the past four years.

John has been teaching ESL at a middle school in Kansas to students in grades six, seven, and eight for the past eight years. He has his Master’s in Reading Instruction, an ESL endorsement, and a PhD in TESOL. At his school there are about 50 students who are eligible for ESL instruction; John serves about half that number. The majority of his students are children of graduate students or professors at the nearby university, so the linguistic populations represented at his school are very diverse. It is up to him to

determine the content of his lessons and each of his classes is structured as a pull out session.

Amie has been teaching K-6 ESL at a school in Oregon for the past five years. Before that she was teaching sixth grade for four years and prior to that she worked for two years as an assistant for students with severe emotional and behavioral disorders. She has her Master's degree in education from a school in Northwest Oregon. She and a co-teacher serve grades K-6 at her school. While her co-teacher serves students who are at an intermediate level and below, Amie serves students who are higher intermediate and early advanced. Other roles at her school include being a part of a Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) team and greeting the kids every morning as they arrive to school. There are about 140 students on the teachers' caseload, and about 40 percent of the total school population qualifies for ESL instruction. There are about thirty different languages spoken at the school, and between 80 and 90 percent of the full school population is eligible for free or reduced lunch. Each grade level has half an hour scheduled each day for ESL, so during that time Amie and her co-teacher pull out all of the ELLs and work with them at their appropriate language levels. Amie is trained in Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD).

Cara has been teaching for sixteen years and has been teaching ESOL for nine years. She has her bachelor's in Elementary Education and her Master's in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis on TESOL from the University of Missouri, St. Louis. Currently she teaches at an elementary school in the greater metropolitan St. Louis area to grades K, 1, and 2. On her case load she has a total of 39 students, eight of whom are "monitor" students who she doesn't work with on a regular basis but rather tracks their

progress/needs through their primary and core content teachers. She works a lot with newcomers at her school and uses both a pull out/push in system whereby she takes students out for individual instruction as well as “pushing in” to their classrooms to help them apply English skills like writing and reading to their core content assignments. Her school uses the “cluster system” in which three teachers are assigned five-six students in order to be able to devote more personalized attention and instruction to smaller groups.

Nadine is in her 24<sup>th</sup> year of teaching. She has taught at four different schools in and around El Paso, TX and has experience teaching incarcerated adults. She has her degree from University of Texas at El Paso in teaching bilingual and ESL and has a minor in reading. This is Nadine’s fourth year of teaching first grade in a bilingual classroom. All of her students are Hispanic and their socioeconomic statuses vary as the school comprises many neighborhoods around El Paso. Her district has adopted “transitional early exit bilingual language classrooms,” in which ideally all students exit the program by third grade. For those who have not exited the program by this point, however, there are still bilingual classes available to them.

Sarah teaches third grade at the same school as Amie in Northwest Oregon. Forty percent of her students are low socioeconomic status, high needs students. Sarah has her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in elementary education and has been teaching for the past six years.

**Table 1:** *Demographic Information of Participants*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Number of Years Teaching</b>	<b>Level of Education Received</b>	<b>Type of Teacher</b>
Grace	7 total, ESL for one	MA in TESOL	ESL- K-4
Mandy	2	BA in French. Endorsed to teach English 7-12 and French	ESL- Middle School and High School
Rebecca	25	PhD in Curriculum & Instruction	ESL- Middle School
Amelia	2	MA Library Science. Endorsed to teach ESL	ESL- Middle School
John	8	PhD in Curriculum and Instruction	ESL- Middle School
Amie	9 years total, ESL for 5	MA TESOL	ESL- K-6
Cara	16 total, ESL for 9	MA TESOL	ESL- K-2
Nadine	24	BA Education	Bilingual first grade
Sarah	6	MA TESOL	Third grade

### Interview Themes

Interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences working with ELLs and elucidated both commonalities amongst participants' experiences, as well as differences based on geographic location, demographic variations of students, and differences in administrative support. I formulated interview questions with the aim of illuminating participants' thoughts regarding the standards movement, specifically the ways it has affected both their own and their students' agency and autonomy in the classroom. After I recorded interviews and transcribed the data, I analyzed the transcripts for themes across participant interviews. I chose themes based on recurrence of ideas and

sentiments as well as their capacity to express both individual participants' narrative as well as their potential to contribute to some kind of a collective narrative amongst participants. I categorized sub-themes under larger umbrella themes, each of which is discussed at length below. These themes were: Standards and Common Core, Social Capital, Support from Administration, and Teacher Identity.

### *Standards and Common Core*

Teachers agreed that standardized testing—both preparing students for the tests as well as administering them—takes up too much class time and does not produce sufficient and consistent results to justify the cost. Many teachers described their students as having “checked out” by the end of the year as a result of over-testing. Rebecca mentioned that her students were being tested throughout the months of April and May:

They had some kind of assessment going [...] almost every day for six weeks, not including the KELPA which is an additional two weeks. And what's bad about it—teachers stopped teaching. They weren't really supposed to but they just kind of did... And the kids were so frizzed out by the end that they weren't interested in doing anything academically.

Amelia echoed this sentiment: “It made everyone sad. And you know, last year the state assessment didn't even count 'cause it was online and there was a hacking... But they still made us give the test.” As one can see through Rebecca saying that “teachers stopped teaching” as a result of the tests and Amelia expressing that “they still made us give the test” despite the fact that they were meaningless, teachers feel utterly out of control of their situations. This feeling of powerlessness connects to what has been reported in the literature about the “deskilling” of teachers (Apple, 2002) and the treatment of them as



“passive technicians” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) whose only job is to administer material and knowledge to students rather than engage them in a meaningful way. When teachers’ expertise is treated in this way, not only teachers but also students are left feeling a sense of purposelessness and loss (Apple, 2002; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Lazarin, 2015; Valenzuela, 2005).

In addition to this depowering of teachers, teachers felt unable to adequately prepare their students for the continuously changing format of tests, which is confusing to ELLs who are not only being asked to understand, memorize, and reproduce new content but also learn continually-evolving formats with which they are unfamiliar. Mandy’s statements about this were representative of participants’ experiences:

A lot of the time they had to drag and drop boxes to different places... they didn’t understand the directions. And I didn’t really understand the directions and what it was asking them to do... But they would drag the box... and it would go back... it didn’t let them put one type of answer in one type of response space. And we couldn’t talk about it! There’s nothing I could do to help them because it says very clearly in the testing manual, ‘No assistance, not even with rules.’ There were times they had to identify something in the passage and go back and determine which paragraph answered the question, ‘in which paragraph does the author use a metaphor?’ and they had to figure out themselves how to use the tool to highlight. It was very frustrating and the kids just gave up and hit submit— they were over it. So I think our scores are gonna be much lower just because of the format.

As one can see in this passage, Mandy feels frustrated by her inability to help students understand what was being asked of them on the tests. Because of the strict guidelines of

the tests that mandated that teachers give no help to students—not even so that they can comprehend what is being asked of them—students did not even try to complete the tests but just “hit submit” and were “over it.” When comprehension is sacrificed for the sake of accountability and standardization of procedures, it is no wonder both teachers and students see no purpose in a given task and its data is rendered meaningless.

Complaints over the format of standardized testing and the ways this can confuse ELLs has long been discussed in the literature. The findings above echo Abedi and Dietel (2004) who discussed the fact that ELLs are expected to utilize multiple skill sets when completing a standardized test. For example, when completing a math question, they must write out their answer such that they are being tested not only on their math skills but also on their English writing abilities. This means that it is impossible for ELLs’ skills in one specific area to be accurately measured. In addition to being asked to utilize multiple skill sets to test one skill set, tests often require that ELLs have access to cultural knowledge they have not been explicitly taught, or recognize colloquial English unfamiliar to a non-native speaker (Glass and Sinha, 2013; Young, 2008). This begs the question as to why more efforts are not being made to create culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) tests that do not require learners to have access to knowledge they haven’t been taught in order to succeed.

Teachers expressed exasperation over the disconnected nature of the standards themselves when compared with the content of standardized tests, as well as the fact that the standards are open to interpretation while the tests are highly specific. A comment from Mandy summed up this frustration well:

The resources and the practice information that come along with [Common Core]? It's not at all like [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)]... And I don't know—like does Louisiana do PARCC testing or do they have their own test? Does Alabama use the same one? My kids move around a lot—I have one who's moving to South Carolina now [...] 'Determine the central idea' isn't a bad standard, but each teacher will teach that a little differently and individual interpretation will change someone's answer to that prompt, so how can we test students on standardized content when they haven't been taught in a standardized way?

Mandy's acknowledgment that "each teacher will teach a little differently" and her poignant remark about the nature of testing students over standardized content when they haven't each been taught in the same way evidences what Dewey and others (Dewey, 1938; Eisner, 2002) have been saying for a long time. When students are being tested on highly specific content but their instruction has covered a wide array of material, this process is not truly standardized at all but rather a system of guesswork.

Research has shown that when there is little coherence between the curriculum and assessments, teachers will often resort to teaching to the test for fear of their students receiving poor scores and this reflecting badly on the teachers (Patrizio, 2012). When teachers must resort to teaching to the test to ensure success, they sacrifice their personal agency to help students and the entire point of teaching is arguably rendered moot. Because teachers professional identities are constructed in the act of teaching, the individual and collective stories teachers tell themselves and each other about their teaching are immensely important. If teachers feel dispassionately about what they are

teaching and do not feel that there is intention in their role to students, their individual senses of self and purpose is surrendered for the sake of homogeny.

Teachers exhibited ambiguous feelings about the evolution of teaching that has occurred as a result of the standards; some even appeared to work through and process their feelings and attitudes about the standards during the interview process itself. A comment from Nadine provides a good example of a personal narrative that has the ability to become a collective one when she discussed her conflicting feelings regarding the standards:

The rigor and demand that we place on the students? I was thinking about that today... And when I'm teaching first graders I think, 'Oh my gosh there's so much we have to teach them!' And we're already exposing them to the tests... [...] If we don't start exposing them to that questioning they're not going to be successful when it comes to the [State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness] test. You have to be consistent with the standards and the questioning but part of me, sometimes, I'm torn because I feel like, 'they're just first graders.' We're pushing them so much. I look at my [white] board here and think... it's too much stimuli. Every year I think they're trying to make it better where it's more specific and not so... I mean... I guess [sighs] I just think they expect too much, too soon. If they were to reorganize it and think realistically, 'Ok, they're first graders'— I'm talking about first graders! It's too much material.

In this quote one sees Nadine working through her contradictory feelings about the standards; her use of words like “rigor and demand” to describe the standards while at the

same time acknowledging that one must be “consistent” for them to work shows that Nadine herself is not entirely sure how she feels about the implementation of standards.

According to Rappaport (1995), narratives can be used both to process change, as well as empower the ones doing the telling to view their role within the context of change differently (p. 76). Collective narratives help people to positively sustain their personal stories and move towards action. This is a reciprocal process, “such that many individuals, in turn, create, change, and sustain the group narrative” (p. 796). What can be seen in Nadine working through her feelings about the standards and their effects on both her teaching and her students is the evolution of her personal story and thus her reclamation of agency to decide her story for herself. She acknowledges the importance of “exposing students to the questioning early” but then asserts that they are “pushing the students too much” and that the curriculum demands “too much too soon.” Despite the fact that she is required to teach to the standards, she voices her opinion that they are overly demanding of the students, placing her own opinion and expertise above those of policymakers. This action has tremendous implications for what the evolving, collective teacher story about the standards has the potential to be, and the direction it could go if more teachers raise their voices and engage in this kind of narrative reflection.

In addition to feeling that the standards broadly demand too much of students, teachers also felt that they assume students have a certain level of background knowledge that is often far beyond what they actually know. As a result, teachers end up needing to fill in the gaps of students’ knowledge which takes up a lot of class time and is less efficient than simply meeting students where they are and working from there. Grace gave an example of this discrepancy when she mentioned a third grade ELL whose level of

understanding was actually at a kindergarten level and resulted in her needing to provide a lot of additional help and resources she sought out on her own time. Cara felt similarly and expressed that the standards view “kindergarten [as] the new first grade and so on.”

Nadine echoed this sentiment and observed “the students ability to learn and absorb isn’t changing, so why are we treating them like they’re suddenly able to retain so much more?”

As one can see from these comments, teachers are frustrated by the high level of demand placed on students whose capacity to learn and develop has not, in fact, all of the sudden changed.

Grace continued this conversation when she discussed teaching kindergarten before ESL, and how teachers are now expected to teach multi-dimensional shapes to kindergartners:

G: Take for instance kindergarten math. It used to be that they had to recognize basic shapes. Well now... in *Kindergarten* [word is emphasized], you also have to recognize 3D shapes L: [laughs] G: So the language they need to be using [laughs]: sphere, cone, triangular prism... so some of these words... I didn't learn about those until I was how old?

L: Yeah. Right.

G: You know? And so, some of it I think with the Common Core it's just... a little too difficult a little too early.

Grace’s comments exemplify the outlooks of teachers who agree that the demand placed on students is beyond their developmental levels—the kids aren’t changing, so they should not be treated as if they are suddenly able to absorb so much more than students in the past.

The findings above repeat what has been discussed in the literature in terms of standards' demanding too much, too soon from students (Main, 2012; House, 2011). Research has long shown that children follow a developmental trajectory in their learning (Piaget & Cook, 1952) and that language learners specifically follow their own track (Pienemann, 1998; Vygotsky, 1987). Grace rightly noted that kindergarteners cannot identify a prism before they know what a triangle is. Similarly, we cannot expect that ELLs will be able to be successful on high-stakes tests if we don't provide the necessary scaffolds first—explicitly teaching the format, working on computer skills, and providing necessary cultural information and colloquial expressions that are needed in order to understand test questions.

Beyond simply teaching the format of tests and teaching students at their developmental level, teachers expressed frustration over the fact that students are graded only for their proficiency on standardized tests (how many points they get right or wrong) rather than looking at more factors than just correct/incorrect that could give a more comprehensive picture of a student's abilities and competencies. For example, in Kansas, students in ESL programs must score all 4s (the highest possible number of points) on the Kansas English Language Proficiency Exam (KELPA) two years in a row in order to exit language programs. Rebecca discussed her frustration with this set up, particularly due to the fact that there is a corresponding relationship between having an ESL endorsed teacher and school funding. In other words, once students enter the program they are in a sense, stuck:

The thing to be aware of is because there's money tied to having an endorsed teacher working with an ELL, there isn't a lot of motivation on the part of the

districts to get the kids out of ESL in my opinion... And then looking at my own situation: 30 kids makes an ESL teacher. We have 63 kids and two teachers. So how motivated am I to get kids out? I mean really, I want them to be out of our school by the time they leave the building and then it's the high school's problem! [Laughs]

The above quote from Rebecca illustrates a few very important things. First of all, she acknowledges that there is not much motivation from the districts to get ELLs out of ESL programs because they get more funding from having more students in these programs. The second interesting thing, however, is that Rebecca acknowledges that even *she* is not very motivated to get ELLs out of her classroom, but rather says she wants them to be out of her school by the time they finish middle school at which point "it's the high school's problem." When even ESL teachers is not motivated to help ELLs exit language programs for fear of losing their jobs or not having enough students to keep multiple ESL teachers staffed, there are evidently bigger problems to be acknowledged than simply questions of formatting or difficult content on the tests. This problem, at its essence, boils down to who is actually helping ELLs in schools, and who simply keeps them around for appearances until they are "somebody else's problem."

Rebecca's statement reiterates what has been stated in the literature: because state funding is directly tied to the number of ELLs one has, there is not much motivation on the part of the district to help students exit the program (Levin, 2014; Salinas, 2013). What Rebecca's statement further reveals, however, is that there is also little motivation on the part of *teachers* to get ELLs out of their programs because teachers' positions depend on their having enough students in their classes. This finding raises important and difficult



questions about the nature of school funding and ESL teaching in public schools in need of further exploration.

In addition to the above-mentioned issues surrounding the standards and testing, teachers expressed concerns over the competition the standards create among teachers because their performance is assessed based on how well their students do on standardized tests. Rebecca told a story about a colleague at her school who is trying to find ways to safeguard against having his ELLs placed in classrooms with poor teachers:

We have a colleague who—also has his PhD, his is from KU—he's a number's guy?

And he's working on this... I don't know what it's gonna be in the end but he's taking aalllll [drawn out] of the assessments his kids take... And he's sort of collating it with the teachers in the school because he thinks there are some teachers who do better with the ESL kids than others... And then he's gonna share it with the principal and say, 'I want my students to be in these classes because they have to do better or else, you know... I'm in trouble.'

What Rebecca's statement shows is that the competition to be a "good" teacher and to have high performing students takes precedence over the relationship between teachers because of the high stakes associated with student performance. In other words, teachers will seek to ensure their students do well on high-stakes tests even if it means sacrificing positive, nourishing, and collaborative relationships with other teachers. Because research has found that there are benefits to teachers' collaboration (Butler & Schnellert, 2012), this finding is significant as it shows teachers are willing to sacrifice mutually supportive relationships that sustain their professional identities for the sake of producing high-performing students with desirable test results. When teachers sacrifice the development

of their professional identities to ensure their maintenance of a profession, something is evidently misaligned.

This problem of competition the standards create between teachers has been echoed in the literature as well as the drastic measures this kind of competition has prompted both teachers and schools to take to “prove” their students success on tests such as falsifying data to maintain accreditation (Ellwein, Glass, & Smith, 1988; McPartland & Schneider, 1996; Apple, 2002). While the desire for accountability and the demand for excellence is not in and of itself a negative consequence of the standards, the schism it evidently creates between teachers, the atmosphere of competition rather than collaboration, and the necessity to prove student success at all costs, are.

In addition to the problems of increased competition and the prevalence of falsified data, rigid accountability measures result in many teachers simply teaching to the test to ensure their students’ success (Desimone, 2013). Amelia provided evidence for this point when she said the following:

Sometimes [sighs] for example, in third grade that’s when they begin administering [the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness]. And um... you hear it a lot and it’s true but if your teaching follows—not that you’re teaching to the test but if it meets the higher order thinking [...] they will perform well.

While it is important that students do well on tests and are able to master content knowledge, it is problematic if they are learning content for the sole purpose of being able to “perform well” on a test. Because what we use to navigate our lives on a daily basis does not simply entail the performance or demonstration of memorized content but rather requires us to utilize critical thinking skills, the ability to multitask, the ability to read social

cues, etc., teaching that inherently limits the amount of information students are exposed to for the sake of delivering prescribed curricula inherently limits the knowledge base students are being exposed to (Desimone, 2013)

Besides the issues with testing outlined above, teachers expressed disappointment with the sheer amount of money that has been spent on writing and re-writing tests over the years, and the resources that have been wasted as a result. When Amelia was a librarian, she was employed by the state to locate newspaper clippings for standardized tests and was compensated \$200 for each clipping she found, receiving a total of about \$1500 for completing this task. When she reviewed the rewritten standardized tests after they came out, she discovered they had used none of the clippings they'd paid her so generously to locate. When teachers feel that the standards waste both their own and students' time, create competition between teachers as opposed to maintaining rapport, test students far beyond their developmental capacities, and do not allow teachers to help students interpret even the test instructions—not to mention the fact that they waste money—it is easy to see why teachers do not have much respect for the standards or feel personally invested in them.

Beyond the amount of money wasted on standardized tests, teachers expressed frustration over the fact that students' individual progress is not tracked through tests. If teachers want to do this, they must do it themselves (which many of the teachers interviewed did). The tests are only used to compare the level of one seventh grade class with a seventh grade class the following year, which is not as meaningful as it would be to track the same class from year to year, or better yet, to track individual students from year to year. Rebecca expressed this frustration in the following way:

I don't mind that we test the kids, I don't mind that we look at their results, I don't mind that we make a plan for the kids based on those results... What I don't like is that we're not tracking individual students to track their growth. We're comparing this year's seventh grade to last year's seventh grade and there's never been any logic to that to me—I've never been able to wrap my brain around the idea that that's what our plan was.

Because the students coming in to one 7<sup>th</sup> grade class have been taught by varying teachers, have been exposed to different information, and come in with diverse knowledge bases, it does not make sense to compare them to an altogether different class with a different set of students from varying backgrounds, etc. It is easy to see why teachers find this comparison irrelevant to students and would prefer to see students' progress tracked year by year or on an individual basis. Because both teachers and students see little purpose in engaging with the standards and putting forth effort on standardized tests (House, 2011; Main, 2012), it is difficult to see how the tests could do anything but fail. When the primary goal of schools is not to ensure students' personal growth and development into well-rounded, liberally educated, and self-actualized human beings but rather to maintain a veneer of success through demonstration of high student test performance at all costs, something is evidently amiss in education.

### *Social Capital*

Teachers discussed their desire for greater social capital in a number of different areas. One such area was parental involvement in students' educations. Sarah mentioned feeling frustrated that her school has reached out to ELLs' parents, trying to get them more

involved in their students' academic lives but not having much success in this pursuit. She said that this has been particularly frustrating since 40 percent of her school comprises ELLs. Sarah elaborated in the quote below:

It's discouraging when we feel like we're starting to reach out to them and then we get a really poor turnout. I know that last year they did an ELD night for the 5th and 6th graders because they want kids to graduate so that next year when they go to middle school they get to be in an elective and not ELD. So, there's a big, 'Hey we want you to do this so that you can be in band or P.E. or choir or whatever if you want to' –something different from learning English if we can get you to exit ELD and the parent turn out wasn't great so we kind of feel like, 'Ok, what else can we do?' We feel like we're really trying in all these different areas but things just aren't panning out because of the language barrier, transportation, their job situation, having younger siblings at home... so I think is holding our school back.

As one can see from this quote, Sarah evidently feels frustrated by her school's inability to get parents involved in their students' educations but also feels confident that her school is doing what it can to reach out to them and is not sure what it could be doing differently to engage parents. Sarah mentioned she tries to find ways to empower families of her students—by telling them that they can review content in the language they use at home, for example, and that they can help their kids with homework in their native language. She tries to help parents see that they have a huge influence over their kids' lives—how they interpret their experiences at school and the importance with which they view their education overall. Parents' behaviors at home and what they choose to focus on during the hours between 4:00 PM and bedtime greatly influences how open students are to putting

forth effort when they wake up for school the next morning, thus parents' roles in their children's education are foundational components to their success.

Because parents are the number one role models for children and their involvement in their education greatly influences how much time and effort students invest in it, it is essential that further efforts be made to include parents— particularly parents of ELLs—in their children's learning. When I was living in Portland I visited a school that had garden plots available to different classrooms and families for use. Parents would come in to help tend their plots and students, teachers, and families would cook meals together with the fresh produce they harvested there. Through these interactions, parents and educators cultivated a seed of trust and relationships began to grow between them. There are many ways to get parents involved and seek to establish trust and communication between educators and students' families— even when it may seem that options for this have been exhausted there are always new and more flexible ways to get parents involved; the desire simply has to be there first, and the action that fosters it, second.

Beyond the need for greater communication between ELLs' families and schools, there must be more communication within schools between ESL teachers and school counselors. Research has found that there are few referrals of students from ESL teachers to counselors for proactive motivations like getting students put in TAG (talented and gifted) programs and instead the primary reasons ELLs are referred to counselors are based on the need to intervene with behavioral situations, class schedules, and academic deficiencies (Clemente & Collison, 2000, p. 343). For students to truly feel cared for at school and be invested in their education, it's necessary to provide the support systems they need to do so. Because students currently see counselors as "reactive rather than

proactive agents” (p. 345) who focus on their weaknesses rather than their strengths, it’s necessary to work on changing this perception, first through the establishment of collaboration between ESL teachers and counselors. In order for students to see counselors as allies instead of adversaries, this relationship must be modeled between counselors and ESL teachers first.

Many of the teachers interviewed agreed that ELLs’ lack support outside of school walls and the issues preventing them from having equal access to a good education require multiple outlets of support. A better way to serve ELLs and lessen the burden teachers carry when they are their only outlet of support is to have greater numbers of bilingual or multilingual counselors available to ELLs so that they have other resources at their disposal besides ESL teachers (Clemente and Collison, 2000, p. 343). If/when students are experiencing extreme or traumatic emotions and need an outlet for their feelings, having multilingual counselors available would be immensely beneficial. Because one’s first language is often the way extreme emotions manifest, it is better to have someone who speaks an ELL’s first language and can hear them express themselves in the language with which they feel most comfortable. If an ELL’s only option is to speak with a monolingual counselor, he/she might keep these feelings bottled up rather than express them partially and awkwardly.

On the flip side of this, if students have a multilingual counselor who keeps track of how they are doing in school, at home, with their boyfriends/girlfriends, with their grades, etc. as well as a teacher who is devoted to helping them improve their language skills, this allows for a more comprehensive support system than one person alone can provide. As a result of this support, ELLs’ may have more opportunities available to them and they might

even be encouraged to stay in school when they otherwise could have dropped out.

A component of the solution to having too few resources available to students and the fact of ESL teachers wearing too many hats would be to have multilinguistic training programs for counselors so that upon graduating from their programs, counselors are already equipped with the necessary linguistic training to successfully work with multiple linguistic populations (Clemente and Collison, 2000, p. 345). The literature has also suggested designing and putting into practice a TAG program for ESL students whereby alternative methods (portfolios, interviews, etc.) would be used to identify gifted students who might have otherwise been overlooked. Because the population of ELLs in schools is growing, it is necessary that schools begin to consider the multilinguistic directions they can take their programs to accommodate the diverse needs of learners in their classrooms.

While there is no silver bullet to help with these problems, there are a number of small solutions that could be implemented to lessen the burden on teachers so that they may be more effective in their designated task to help students. In addition to having greater numbers of qualified, multilingual counselors there could be and interpreters on site as well as tutors whose specific purpose is to help ESL students with their core content homework. In this way, no one person would be overwhelmed with the duties of balancing all of the needs of this specific population and each party could focus on his/her designated role and do the best job possible within the scope of that role.

### *Support from Administration*

In general, teachers reported feeling supported by their administration; the levels of involvement from different administrators differed, but they seemed to correspond with



the level of involvement teachers wanted. For example, John's administration is more actively involved and provides more formal guidance while Rebecca's and Amelia's is more "hands off," which they like as they want to have more freedom to determine their content. ESL teachers reported that what they teach is largely theirs to determine as there is no set curriculum. Some found this level of autonomy to be freeing (Rebecca, Amelia, John, Cara) while others don't feel supported by their schools as a result and are frustrated by the lack of resources available to them (Mandy, Grace, Nadine, Sarah, Amie).

Teachers mentioned wishing their administration prioritized their programs more when it came to acquiring resources. Grace illustrated this idea when she discussed a desire to see greater numbers of resources specifically for ESL teachers at her school since right now a lot of the materials she uses are simply "hand me downs" from other teachers:

We don't have our own curriculum. So what's happening right now with reading—[laughs]—if you look at these books over here, these used to be title reading books. And now they're kind of discarded... So that's what we have. I find myself going to teachers' classrooms a lot and asking, you know, 'Can I borrow this?' and they're all really friendly and it's fine... But there could be more of a set curriculum and materials available.

As Grace's comment shows, she is able to cobble together the resources she needs, but this only occurs as a result of her "going to teachers classrooms and asking 'Can I borrow this'" as opposed to having resources specifically designated for her ESL program. The desire for materials was a common sentiment among teachers who felt that a lot of the resources they had, they acquired as a result of the time and effort they put in themselves rather than help from their administration. What teachers' sentiments and Grace's exemplary comment

reveal is the minimal prioritization of ESL programs by administration; when these programs are given such little attention to the point of being denied new and relevant textbooks and resources, it is no wonder teachers feel forgotten.

Viewing this issue from a more positive angle, Sarah discussed some of the benefits she sees from having materials in English and other languages available to students:

I had a newcomer from Iraq and he found a book of flags from around the world... He checked it out and he loved to go around and ask people ‘You, which flag?’ and that was really cool and if we had different [resources about different] cultures that could be incorporated— kids love learning about it! At first it's a little uncomfortable but then kids learn more and they realize ‘Oh this is actually really cool.’

As can be seen from Sarah’s quote, having more culturally-relevant materials available to students not only makes learning more engaging for them, but it also helps them reach out to one another and connect. In this way, students from different cultures can learn from one another and expand what they know in the process.

In addition to greater numbers of culturally relevant classroom materials, teachers expressed the desire to have greater numbers of resources that are already Common Core aligned based on grade and that also offer varying levels of curricula within that grade level. For example, for students who are in fifth grade there could be 3-4 different “levels” of material that are designed to get all students to meet the requirements of Common Core for fifth grade, while at the same time still being sensitive to the fact that not all students will come in with the same skill sets or knowledge base. Many students will start off at varying levels, thus having a variegated system for each grade level will help to meet

students “where they are” within the curriculum as opposed to expecting them to all start off at the same place. Grace expanded on the desire for more nuanced Common Core-aligned resources:

Sometimes I feel like some of my students who may come in as third graders... They still need skills that some of the kindergartners need but um... at their level. So maybe the same curriculum that’s differentiated enough for those students, and something that’s easy for teachers to implement. Like, ‘Look! This Common Core curriculum that came out that’s already perfectly aligned with the Standards gives me exactly what I need to help this kid at his level...’ It would just be nice if teachers didn’t have to seek out these resources on their own.

As this quote from Grace shows, teachers are not opposed to utilizing Common Core curricula, but want it to meet the needs of their students as much as possible. If greater numbers of resources are already Common Core-aligned and differentiated within grade levels to suit students’ individual needs, there would likely be fewer instances of teachers having to seek out their own resources (many of which are not Common Core-aligned) and spend their personal time and energy to do so. If the overall goal is to get all students to be “on the same page” with their educational opportunities and to provide equal access to learning, there must be greater numbers of resources that are better scaffolded in order for this to happen for all students instead of just those who already “fit” within the established set of curricula.

When asked about what their ideal teaching situation would look like—what parts of it are currently in place and what parts are lacking or could be improved—several teachers mentioned that they would like to see a newcomer program to help kids adjust to

life in the U.S. when they first arrive. Mandy's thoughts summarize this idea well: "If I could wave my magic wand as far as this building goes, I'd like to see a newcomer program [...] I mean I want them to be mainstreamed but there in the beginning, having a newcomer program to kind of set the pace, you know... That would be so great." In addition to offering newcomer programs to help students adjust to being in the American classroom, multiple teachers mentioned that they would like to see smaller class sizes, greater numbers of bodies in the classroom (other teachers or Para educators, for example), larger classrooms, having interpreters on site, or having tablets available for each student so that they could translate words to communicate with their teachers if/when that teacher doesn't speak the student's native language. Grace said she would change the following about her classes:

One big thing I would change is class size. Last year I had 26 kindergartners... And like I said, you know, we're a high needs school. So, you know that includes a handful of special needs kids and lower-achieving kids who maybe didn't have breakfast—I mean seriously—or don't have a bedroom to sleep in... They sleep in the living room and can't go to bed when the parents are still awake late at night so, you know? The kind of circumstances these kids go through. When I had 26 kindergartners there were times when it just felt like we were trying to survive in there. So I would definitely say class size and more bodies in the classroom.

Nadine echoed this sentiment: "For me, the ideal classroom is not so much the classroom but more of an ideal setting where teachers would have an aid—first grade and kinder teachers would all have aids in their classrooms. I have 22 students so that to me would be an ideal classroom—to have more help."

Teachers mentioned that they would like to see a single ESL teacher per grade level so that they can know the standards inside and out for that one grade level instead of having to try to remember all of them for multiple grades. For some of the teachers who are working with multiple grade levels—sometimes as many as five at a time—this can be a daunting task and it can seem impossible to memorize as many standards as are required to be able to teach effectively to multiple grade levels.

Teachers also expressed the desire for more time to collaborate with other classroom teachers. John spoke about the scheduling difficulties that make it difficult to collaborate with teachers,

I'd love to [collaborate] more. I hate the way it is set up right now 'cause I almost can't. When I have—when teachers have their two consecutive planning periods—half of it is they get together as a team half of it is their own personal planning time on a daily basis- and it just, by the way the scheduling works that's when I get those kids in that grade level in my class, that's the only time I get 'em usually. So I'm unavailable. You have to kind of fight for it a little bit. It's a pain. But collaborating really pays off if you do it.

If ESL teachers only worked with one grade level, they might be more easily able to collaborate with core content teachers since they could organize their meetings around an elective or study period, or a P.E. class. ESL teachers could take more time to closely observe their grade level, working together with core content teachers, and meet the requirements of that grade level more easily since he/she wouldn't be distracted by thinking about developing curriculum for other grade levels and keeping track of several different sets of standards.

All teachers agree they would like more professional development opportunities, as well as more time and opportunities to collaborate with core content teachers.

Grace described a course of action her coordinator was considering that would pair core content and ESL teachers together so that instead of pulling students out individually, Grace would come into the regular classroom to work with students there instead and to help the core content teacher. As a result of this collaboration, ESL students would not miss out on important content information while they are learning English. These kinds of programs would allow for greater collaboration between teachers and would help to ensure that ELLs are getting the same academic content knowledge as their native English-speaking peers. All of these above-mentioned methods can be utilized to create a better support system for ELLs and their teachers in schools, and establish the kinds of administrative support that will lead to greater overall student success.

### *Teacher Identity*

Throughout the interviews, teachers discussed the ways that they see their jobs as ESL teachers as going beyond simply being “deliverers of knowledge” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) to being a vocation that fundamentally affects their identities and conceptions of self. A common self-perception among teachers, and a self-selected identity was that of being counselors to their students. Teachers are aware of the many problems that many ELLs face outside of schools, particularly those who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. These issues include the maintenance of a stable home life, having access to enough food, and being free of the fear of violence (Kieffer, 2010). In order for ELLs to be truly successful in school, these factors need to be taken into account; however, because these issues lie

outside of the scope of what an ESL teacher's job is supposed to be, teachers often end up taking on more of a counselor role in which their students confide some of the issues they're dealing with at home. Mandy—who teaches in a low-income, high needs public high school in Mississippi—spoke at length about feeling like a counselor to her students: “We have a lot of um... long-term ELLs in our district who come here and went to kindergarten [here] and aren't progressing anymore cause they're just kinda over it and by the time you get to 8<sup>th</sup> grade you're turning 14, 15... You can get a job. They drop out of school and... who's gonna look out for them?”

Mandy spoke about the high student dropout rates at her school and the fact that when she did see some of her kids graduate last year, it was a very exciting and rare moment worthy of celebration:

It was the first time in my three years of teaching that [any of my students] have finished. I was like hootin' and hollerin' [laughs]... 'Cause they really tried and it's difficult for anybody—we do have the lowest graduation rate—but especially for ELLs when there are so many other distractions and you know, things they can get into. Their parents don't speak English... they work at a chicken farm. It's really easy to get a job and not fool with school anymore... Why would you wanna read, why would you wanna go do that, you know?

Mandy's quote is exemplary of the fact that teachers are aware of the many challenges facing ELLs once they leave school walls and the fact that schools can only control so much of what students have to deal with. Mandy gave several other anecdotes about students she has worked with at her high school that illustrate the factors working against them outside of school. When asked,

“What do you think the biggest issue facing ELLs is and how can it be fixed?” Mandy responded, speaking about one of her students,

[A student in my class] went to kindergarten here but her brothers all dropped out and there are father issues and other things and mom’s at the chicken farm... She needs some help with reading but her English is fine, she’s very conversational, she writes well enough... If she never learned any more English she would be just fine and she knows that... If she were to drop out of school she would get a job. Her English is not the problem.

Mandy’s sentiments reflect what past research has already discussed: ELLs who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds are at a higher risk of developing difficulties in school later on and even dropping out of school (Kieffer, 2010; Gwynne, Pareja, Ehrlich, & Allensworth, 2012). Students’ home lives affect their ability to function at school, thus if students’ lives outside of school walls are unstable, their participation in school will likely reflect this. Mandy’s elected identity as a counselor to her students allows her to regain agency over the situation and at the same time shows the ways that identity is created through social interaction and based on the needs of those in the interaction (Cooley, 1902, pp. 183-184; De Coeur, Rawes, & Warecki, 2012). Mandy further describes the ways she extends her responsibilities to her students beyond what one would expect of a “typical” classroom teacher:

These kids get stuck in the middle. [For one of my students] I can choose or let her choose what she wants to read and we can talk about it but then... she broke up with her boyfriend and sometimes there are pregnancies and health issues and... I mean we don’t sell pencil sharpeners because kids take the screws out and cut themselves



with the blades in the bathroom. I had a student who told me things about a miscarriage—and they didn't even know the words for that they just knew that they went to the doctor and... no more baby. [...] I get so involved sometimes that I find myself worrying and it stresses me out. I spend so much time with these kids for two years and I'm like THEIR teacher... Like if there's ever a problem at the school, the parents call me 'cause nobody else speaks Spanish [laughs]

As this finding shows, the role of an ESL teacher is a unique vocation that goes beyond simply teaching the material; ESL teachers provide an essential service to students and help them navigate issues they are dealing with in all areas of their lives.

In addition to being a confidante, role model, and friend to ELLs, ESL teachers' identities even extend to that of being parental figures. Rebecca and Amelia discussed their self-selected identities of being students' "American moms"—providing them with snacks, making sure their room is stocked with supplies students may need for different projects, helping them with their homework, giving them a place to eat their lunch, etc. Rebecca elaborates,

I see myself as being their American mom. A key part of my job is helping them to negotiate, you know their day. And so, I mean they eat lunch in our room, we make sure they have snacks, we make sure they have all the school supplies they need so they don't have to go and, you know, buy poster board or whatever... We just try to help them understand what things oughtta look like. The things my stay-at-home mom did for me in the '60s: 'Well, it probably oughtta be a little neater, you know... You can't really read that.' Editing their work. We do a lot of that. We try to make them feel cared for.

This finding echoes what has been found in the literature regarding pedagogy of care: teachers see themselves as teaching not just to the minds of children, but to the “whole child” (Dewey, 1938)—helping them to develop their intellectual capacities as well as their artistic, creative, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual potentials (Miller, 2008, p. 5). In other words, the overall aim of teachers is to help students reach self-actualization (Maslow, 1954). Teachers’ identities and self-perceptions extend beyond simply teaching students what they need to know to pass a test; they see themselves as necessary providers of care and love in students’ lives.

It is interesting to note that while Mandy, Rebecca, and Amelia all identified with the notion of being counselors to their students, the three interpreted this identification very differently. For Mandy, being a counselor to her students meant helping them deal with difficult and painful moments in their lives—a mom and dad who weren’t around or an unplanned pregnancy and the need to drop out of school, for example. For Rebecca and Amelia, this role meant being “American moms” to their students: helping them with homework, making sure they are well-fed, and making sure they have all the supplies they need. This difference in interpretation of roles evidently stems from the schools’ varying socioeconomic statuses and availability of resources—Mandy’s school is in an urban setting in Mississippi where dropout rates for ELLs (and all students) are very high, socioeconomic status of students is low, and resource availability is scarce. At Rebecca and Amelia’s school, the socioeconomic status is significantly higher—with many of the students being sons or daughters of PhD candidates or professors at a nearby university. Rebecca and Amelia have greater numbers of resources available to them at their school than Mandy does; their blended learning classrooms are equipped with smart boards, Apple TVs, iPads

for every student, as well as comfortable chairs and couches. This contrast shows the marked difference between what ELLs in more or less affluent situations are faced with on a daily basis and the struggles the latter category must deal with that go beyond school walls (Kieffer, 2010; Walsh et al. 2014).

All teachers expressed their belief that one has to teach to the “whole child” and develop rapport with them before any learning can take place. Teachers agreed that there is a need to get students involved in their own learning. Rebecca and Amelia had a strategy to do this—they create cards so that their students can see their previous scores to see if they’ve improved. Rebecca elaborated,

We created a card since we have 6, 7, and 8<sup>th</sup> the card starts at 5<sup>th</sup> grade. And we sit down with them on day one—they write down what their scores were, we reminisce about what those tests were and what it meant. And then they can see—in multicolor on the screen—where they are, where they should be, where their classmates are... And the MAP test is cool because—for whatever its flaws are— it gives them their scores right away at the end when they finish so it's really instant.

We have kids run in, grab their cards, write down their score and say "Look Ms.

[Rebecca]! Look Ms. [Amelia]! My score went up!" and that is really cool to see.

As one can see from the above interactions, teachers’ success with students fundamentally alters their self-esteem and how they view themselves; they put their heart and soul into these interactions. Research has found connections between teachers’ job satisfaction, occupational commitment, self-efficacy, and changes in levels of motivation (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijjaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2012). In other words, how teachers feel in one area of their lives affects how they feel in other areas. Thus policy that inherently *limits*

teachers' autonomy and abilities to be active participants in their students' lives has negative implications for how fulfilled they are likely to feel in all areas of their life. If the overall goal is to have teachers who are instructing students to the best of their abilities, it is essential that they feel fulfilled and satisfied with as many components of their jobs and lives as is possible.

When talking about her teaching philosophy, Sarah talked about her method of holding students accountable for their learning:

I am a big proponent of the idea that every student can and will learn if you give them the chance and you have to include them in education as well. With my classes I try to do a lot of goal setting like, 'Ok, let's look at where you were when you started this, let's look at where you're at.' And... It's really amazing to them when you start to share what their reading level means so that they have more of a want to get better. Doing a lot of 'Ok, it's conference time, I need YOU to look at your work from the term and look at what were you proud of, what's something you were not super happy with, and what's something you want to improve on.' Bringing kids into that really makes your life easier and it also gives them the knowledge to want to improve and to be able to improve.

As this finding shows, teachers seek to be the facilitators of student success, but do not see themselves as the sole proprietors of it. Students are held as accountable if not more than teachers for their own success in education; while teachers can help to foster student learning, the students themselves who are the primary agents of it. A primary facet of teachers' identities within education is that of being a support service to students; standards that limit teachers' capacities to help students take initiative and ownership over

their learning negatively influences both student success as well as teachers' identities and professional sense of self-worth.

Despite these limitations, teachers still find ways to exercise agency over the curriculum and take ownership over the standards, namely through collaboration. Sarah, who teaches third grade at the same school where Amie teaches ESL, mentioned ways she and her co-teacher have been able to collaborate to make the changes that come along with the standards more manageable so that no one person feels the brunt of the burden:

Last year my co-teacher and I just decided, 'We are gonna go through this' so my teaching partner, myself, and the title teacher would meet Friday afternoons, look at next week, look at the vocabulary and talk about how we were going to approach it so that kids were hearing the same things no matter who they were meeting with. So this year we're going to spend more of our time [...] looking at what do we need to do now that we've taught this once, what notes should we make for ourselves, where do we need to add in more... So we might have a little bit more [prep time] this year but I really feel like we can take what it is and make it what it needs to be for our kids.

As this quote shows, despite the fact that the standards require that teachers' adapt their teaching and curricula, teachers still exercise agency over how they implement them and what they choose to focus on. Research has shown that collaboration on the whole greatly benefits both teachers and students and aids in changing practices, especially when teachers are able to collaborate over time (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). Thus if schools provided more opportunities for teachers to do so—establishing structured time slots during the school days when teachers can collaborate with one another or share

resources—this would ensure that teachers could develop their practices in ways that best benefit their own professional development, teaching, and capacity to support student success.

## Chapter V

### *Recommendations*

The recommendations that emerged out of interviews with participants fell into four categories: those intended for policymakers, those meant for teacher education programs, as well as administration at schools and teachers themselves. I will briefly address some of the recommended changes for each of these four categories.

For policymakers, teachers recommended the creation of more resources that are already Common Core-aligned but variegated into different levels by grade so that learners who are in the same grade but are at different point in their knowledge have the appropriate resources to meet their needs. As an extension of this, teachers recommended that the standards put more consideration into the age of the learners they are creating educational policies for. As mentioned in above sections, students learn at the level for which they are primed—they cannot skip levels—therefore it is essential that they be properly “primed” with necessary background knowledge before being asked to grapple with complex ideas.

In a similar vein, teachers recommended that there be more of a focus on sentence formation and grammar in the standards specifically for ELLs. Currently, the focus is primarily on having students make predictions about readings or do comparisons, but if students haven’t gained sentence level mastery first they will not have the tools necessary to be able to articulate these complex ideas. Next teachers were adamant that more efforts

should be made to get teachers involved in planning at the policy level. Making a significant effort to get teachers involved in planning policy and developing curriculum will help to lessen the gap between what policy plans for and what teachers actually see in their classrooms. Finally, teachers agreed that there must be a reduction in the number of standardized tests given to students throughout the year. Both teachers and students are overwhelmed and frustrated with the amount of time spent on standardized tests; the time it takes to prepare for and administer the tests takes away from valuable time that teachers and students could be spending in the classroom developing rapport as well as a wider breadth of knowledge than can be gained through covering the standards alone.

For teacher education programs, several recommendations emerged. First, teachers mentioned wanting to have multilingual counselors available to students whose first language is not English. As mentioned in previous sections, ESL teachers are often the only resources available to these students. Training to become a multilingual counselor could start in teacher education programs, which could widen their focus from solely training teachers to preparing them to face the many challenges that come along with being an ESL teacher—being able to communicate in students’ native languages if possible, but also simply being prepared to meet the needs students inevitably come to the table with beyond simply learning the English language. Having this additional preparation will help teachers feel more prepared and competent in meeting this role for their students.

Beyond additional linguistic training and preparation to take on the role as counselor to students, several teachers mentioned the helpfulness of their having gone through the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training, an evidenced based training which is a “proven framework for teaching both academic content and

language skills in ways that are more effective for English learners, and [which] helps teachers plan and deliver lessons with all students' language needs in mind" ("The SIOP Model", para. 1). Because ELLs will not only work with their ESL teachers but will interact in mainstream classrooms as well, having this additional cultural competence and ability to work effectively with all kinds of learners will greatly benefit all teachers and provide them with concrete ways to get ELLs more involved in the classroom and keep them engaged.

For schools and administration at schools, teachers had many recommendations. The first and most commonly cited among teachers was the need for more time to collaborate between ESL and mainstream classroom teachers. As mentioned in previous sections, regular classroom teachers often have meetings at the same time that ESL teachers have students, therefore it is nearly impossible for them to meet/collaborate with regular classroom teachers. Changing the scheduling so that this collaboration can happen more frequently would greatly benefit both sets of teachers so that they can corroborate their lessons and make sure each are building on what the other is teaching in his/her classroom so that lessons as a whole are more integrative and goal-oriented. Teachers also mentioned wanting to have multilingual interpreters on site so that ESL teachers are not the sole resource available to ELLs. As mentioned previously, research has found that students whose first language is not English often express themselves in their native language when they are feeling particularly emotional about something. If it is not possible for them to express themselves and be understood in this way, they might opt for shutting down and bottling up these emotions rather than expressing them in a language that doesn't feel comfortable or come easily to them. Having multilingual counselors available to students would help to remedy this situation since students' first inclination—to express



themselves in their native language—would be able to be intercepted and comprehended by someone who could help.

All teachers agreed that there should be some kind of Newcomer program made available to new students by schools. Teachers were adamant that this program should not detract from students' integration into "mainstream" classrooms, but that it should serve as a support system to those who are completely new to the U.S. and thus need some additional help and scaffolding to learn not only the language but also school culture and United States culture more broadly. Offering this kind of program would help new students to feel a sense of home and welcoming in an unfamiliar place at the same time that they start to integrate into that place. Along the same lines, teachers recommended that schools focus more on getting parents of students involved at the school. Since ELLs' parents often have busy work schedules that conflict with times they can be involved at the school, one way of doing this that has already been implemented in Oregon would be to establish a community garden at the school. Each family could tend a plot when it is convenient for them, and the school could create opportunities for students and their families to come together to make meals out of the produce they would cultivate together in the garden. This is a great way to foster a sense of community involvement while at the same time being realistic about families' busy schedules and so not making this involvement a requirement.

Teachers' next recommendation to schools was regarding the number of students in each class and the number of ESL teachers currently at schools. Many ESL teachers I talked to felt overwhelmed with the number of grades they were required to account for—and thus the number of standards they were trying to juggle and keep in mind for each student.

One teacher was teaching grades K-4, so she had to remember standards for five grade levels. A solution to this problem would be to have one ESL teacher per grade level. By doing this, each teacher would only have to keep track of the standards for one grade level and so would be much more effective in this specific capacity. They could know the standards through and through so that they could truly focus on equipping students with the knowledge and content mastery they need to be able to successfully meet the requirements of each standard.

The final requirement teachers had for administration at schools was that there need to be smaller classes. One teacher mentioned having 26 students in her class and feeling like they were “just trying to survive in there.” Since class size is related to student success (Bruhwiler & Blatchford, 2011; Chingos, 2013) it is essential that this be made a priority by administration, even if it means weaning down the budget in other areas. On the same lines, teachers mentioned that simply having more bodies in the classroom (para educators or aides) would greatly help and reduce their stress levels of having to keep track of all students themselves.

For teachers, the interviewees had several recommendations that emerged from their own experiences. First and foremost was collaboration. The teachers who had made an effort to collaborate with one another felt much more fulfilled in their roles and felt a sense of community with other teachers as a result of this collaboration. Beyond this, collaborating with others by way of designing lesson plans and creating materials gave teachers a sense of agency in their work that they otherwise would not have had if they hadn’t shared resources and practices. The second recommendation was for teachers to utilize resources like the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) in

Portland, Oregon, which aims to help immigrants and refugees integrate into the broader community. IRCO does this by way of offering language and translation services through its language bank—which teachers utilize for parent/teacher conferences, for example—as well as many other services such as employment, vocational training and English language learning, youth academic support and gang prevention, as well as early childhood and parent education just to name a few areas (“Empowering Immigrants,” para. 2).

By making changes in each of the aforementioned areas, teachers, administrators, and policymakers can begin to work together in a more collaborative and mutually beneficial way such that the entire system of education functions more as an integrative unit rather than each part acting within its own domain. This will serve to make the entire practice of education stronger, more evidence-based, and more purposeful so that all parties feel as invested and fulfilled by their positions within the system as possible.

### *Limitations*

The primary limitation of this study was that I only interviewed participants once for one hour as opposed to having interviewed them multiple times. Having longitudinal data would have strengthened this study as it would have relayed a more comprehensive picture of participants’ experiences. That being said, with the limited time of each interview, it was surprising how much interviewees delved into their experiences and shared their insights into the standards’ effects on them personally and what they have observed in their students. A second limitation of this study was that it utilized a single method of inquiry whereas multiple forms would have helped to strengthen its transferability. For example, had I interviewed the participants as well as observed them

teach through participant observation, this would have provided multiple sources of data and given me a broader understanding of both participants' interpretations of their experiences, as well as what I would have observed directly through sitting in on their classes.

A final limitation of this study is that I only interviewed teachers and did not obtain the perspectives of principals, administrators, or ELLs themselves on the issues discussed herein. While I was able to get a sense of what a select group of teachers thought about issues of standardization, the study would have been strengthened with the perspectives of those mentioned above who would have brought different concerns and overall perspectives to the study than did teachers alone. It would have also fortified the study to be able to see if there were any discrepancies in perspectives of the standards and their effects on students between teachers, principals, administrators and the students whose potential life chances are directly impacted by the standards.

### *Conclusion*

Based on the interviews conducted with teachers, I have come to the conclusion that despite the limitations enacted on teachers by the standards, these teachers utilize self-selected identities to maintain their agency and exert their autonomy both within and outside of their classrooms. The public affects the private and the professional becomes personal. Because ESL teachers are different from regular classroom teachers due to the fact that they are oftentimes ELLs' sole outlets of support, these teachers provide a fundamental service of care that is unable to be standardized. Because teachers interpret the standards at the local level and they are human agents with changing moods, evolving

perceptions of students' engagement and understanding, and the ability to respond to those students' needs—either accelerating or slowing the pace of teaching with respect to those needs, the standards will never be able to fully account for what a teacher does or does not do in the classroom. Regardless of how policy makers may try to impose certain formulas for teaching and posit teachers as “passive technicians” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) who spoon feed students knowledge, teachers ultimately choose what they do in the classroom, how they view themselves, and the identities with which they engage as well as those they elect to reject.

Also based on the findings of interviews, I have come to the conclusion that teachers' self-perceptions and professional identities form a large part of how they enact agency and regain control over their classes despite what dictates the standards impose. Research has found that we learn best when we make positive emotional connections to something and that stressful school environments negatively impact students' abilities to learn (Sylwester, 1994; Perry, 2000; Vail, 2010) and that good teaching is an artistic endeavor as much if not more than it is a scientific one (Eisner, 2002; Flanagan, 2014; Eden, 2012), thus teaching, at its core, is about crafting an environment wherein an emotional connection between people is created so that learning can take place. Standardizing curricula thus ignores a fundamental component of what teaching and learning entail: making a local, dynamic, and continually evolving connection to others so that information becomes relevant to one's own identity.

The latent power present in this continually evolving, dynamic identity is more powerful than any attempt to standardize human behavior can be. Teachers' identities go beyond simply regurgitating material for students to memorize; their self-assigned

identities as “counselors” and “American moms” to their students deeply affect their sense of self and personhood and are thus stronger than any prescribed identity with which they have no personal connection is capable of being.

Finally, based on the findings of this study and many others, I add my voice to the many others who have already maintained that while certain institutions can be standardized, education is not one of them. Unlike the manufacturing of cars or planes, educating children does not simply entail “the production” of learned adults capable of regurgitating knowledge or facts, but rather critically thinking, continually evolving, autonomous and emotional beings able to function in a diverse and transformative world. This knowledge does not simply come from memorizing facts and proving one’s knowledge on tests; it comes from having had teachers who truly care about holistic educating students and helping them to gain understandings of the world and themselves that go beyond textbook knowledge.

Teaching is a unique vocation of which inherent artistry necessarily prevents it from being able to be standardized (Dewey, 1938; Eisner, 2002). What this study seeks to show, and the conversation it seeks to contribute to, is how this standardization of teaching and curricula only serves to hurt both educators and students, and has a detrimental effect on everyone’s engagement, morale, sense of purpose, and identity. If we are to truly help all students not only be “college and career ready” once they leave the K-12 education system but to be prepared for life and all its challenges more broadly, we must come to terms with how deeply flawed the current educational system is in the United States, and make an honest effort to create something better.

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**APPENDIX A: Interview Questions*****Background information***

- Tell me about your teaching background.
  - Where did you earn your credentials?
  - How long have you been working as an ESL specialist? What other roles do you play at your school?
  - Have you participated in additional training/professional development? If so, when, where and what type?
- Where have you taught?
- How would you describe the student population of your class? Of prior classes?
  - Are there more students from any specific cultural backgrounds at your school or is there a wide range?
- Describe your school and classrooms (i.e. class size, grade(s), textbooks and materials, etc.)
- How much time and in what context do you teach ESOL?
- What made you want to become a teacher?
- How would you describe your philosophy of teaching?

***English Language Teaching in the U.S.***

- What do you see as the purposes of teaching English in the U.S.?
- What do you find are the best or most effective ways of teaching ESOL?
- Do you rely on any [theoretical] guiding principles in your teaching of English? If so, what are they?
- How do you assess your students' progress in English?
- ELLs current dropout rate is 25 percent while non-English learners' is 15 percent. Researchers found that English learners who were reclassified as fluent in English in later grades had higher dropout rates than those who were reclassified in the early grades: 33 percent dropped out if they were still classified as ELLs in high school, 22 percent of those reclassified in grade 5 or sooner dropped out, while 15 percent of students who got reclassified in grade 2 or earlier dropped out. What do you think about these statistics and how do they mesh with your own experience?

***Teachers' Impressions of Standards Movement and its effects***

- What are your impressions of the Standards movement?
  - How have you seen it affecting ELLs?
  - How has it affected your own teaching and level of autonomy in the classroom?
- Do you feel supported by your staff/administration in teaching ELLs? If so, in what ways? If not, in what ways?
- What differences do you see in students' performance under Common Core?

- If you teach native English speakers in addition to ELLs, do you see differences between the performance of students whose first language is English and the performance of those whose first language is not? If so, what are those differences?
- [If T has been teaching long enough for this to be applicable] How has students' performance changed on standardized tests and other classroom materials before No Child Left Behind, during, and now with the installment of Common Core?
- Do you feel you've been adequately prepared to implement the changes required by Common Core in your school? If so, what did that training look like?

### ***Teachers' Use of Collaboration***

- What are your thoughts on collaboration with other teachers? Have you been able to do this in your own practice, and if so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you feel supported by your staff/administration to collaborate with other teachers both in your school and outside of school?
- How does time (or lack thereof) affect your commitment to collaboration?

### ***Teacher Identity and Policy Recommendations***

- What do you see as your role to ELLs?
  - Do you currently see yourself helping them in the best ways you can? If so, how do you do this, and if not, what barriers do you see as preventing this from happening?
- If you could wave a magic wand to create your ideal English classroom, what would it look like? What pieces of your ideal classroom are currently in place? What's stopping you from creating the other aspects of your ideal English language classroom now?
- What would you say is the most difficult part of your job right now?
- What recommendations would you give to designers of Common Core, specifically in relation to teaching ESOL?
- What recommendations would you give to the government in terms of teacher professional development and policy implementations?
- If you could revamp teacher education so that teachers would be better prepared to work with ELLs in a standardized context, what recommendations would you make?

**APPENDIX B: Interview Administration Instructions**

If you plan to use interview questions from this study, please contact the author before use (email: leah.mortenson@gmail.com)

If there are any questions or concerns, please get in touch with the author at your earliest convenience.

Leah Mortenson

Primary Investigator

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